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## NEUROLOGICAL STAMP

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### Carlos Juan Finlay y Barres (1833-1915)

Finlay was born in a little town in Puerto Principe in Cuba. His father was a Scottish physician and his mother of French origin. They had come to Cuba via Trinidad and his father established a successful practice in medicine, especially in ophthalmology. Finlay started his medical studies at the Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia where he graduated in 1855. After spending one year with the neurologist Silas Weir Mitchell, he went to Paris and studied neurology and ophthalmology. In 1857 he began practising in Havana. He was a general practitioner but specialised in ophthalmology and soon became attracted to infectious disease and epidemiological problems in Cuba. Finlay's ophthalmological publications dealt with a case of exophthalmos due to tumour, a new method of cataract extraction, the complications of atropine, visual disturbances caused by malaria and by quinine, and binocular vision.

When in 1881, Dr Carlos Finlay advanced the theory that yellow fever was transmitted by the bite of a species of the mosquito *Aedes*, he was ridiculed by his medical colleagues. His ideas were ignored for 20 years. Finlay was struck by the presence of the mosquito *Aedes aegypti* in houses during epidemics and noted that the yellow fever and mosquito season seemed to coincide. But, following the suggestion of Finlay, one of the greatest triumphs of modern hygiene occurred with the conquest of yellow fever by the United States Army Yellow Fever Board (1900), consisting of Walter Reed (1851-1902), James Carroll (1854-1907), Jesse W Lazear (1866-1900), and Aristide Agramonte (1869-1931). As no animals could be made to develop the disease, Carroll volunteered to be bitten by an infected mosquito and developed yellow fever but, fortunately, recovered. Lazear, bitten by an infected mosquito, died after a few days of illness. The army, under the leadership of Dr William C Gorgas (1854-1920) established the vector and calculated the incubation period. By destroying the mosquitoes Havana was freed of yellow fever for the first time in 150 years. The construction of the Panama canal was made possible by using the same methods. Before Gorgas freed the isthmus of yellow fever and other dangerous infections, the area was almost uninhabited by the white race, and was known as the "white man's

grave". In 1927 three Nigerian physicians, Adrian Stokes, Johannes H Bauer, and N Paul Hudson confirmed that the yellow fever agent was a filterable virus and in 1937 Max Theiler, a South African microbiologist working at the Rockefeller Foundation, developed an effective vaccine.

Finlay was honoured philatelically by Cuba in 1934 in the 100th year of his birth (Stanley Gibbons 399, Scott 319). Finlay was also honoured by postmarks.

Finlay's son Carlos Edouard Finlay (1868-1944), who became Professor of Ophthalmology of Havana University in 1907 and later Director of Charities of Havana, President of the First National Cuban Medical Congress, and Dean of the Medical Faculty and Director of Public Health in Cuba, has also been honoured philatelically in a stamp issued by Cuba in 1965.

L F HAAS

